

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

030517Z Jul 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001820

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMCA](#) [KMPI](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION COALITION PREPARES FOR 2006 ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA Nabeel Khoury for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. In recent weeks Sanaa has been abuzz with rumors that the opposition party coalition, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) plans to nominate a challenger to President Saleh in 2006. In late May, members of the JMP central committee, comprised of one designated representative from each party, discussed the upcoming elections with poloffs. The JMP has yet to obtain agreement from all parties on a reform agenda, let alone a candidate for the Presidency, but the leaders were hopeful that a JMP reform initiative would soon be released. End Summary.

-----  
Al-Ahmar an Obstacle to Islah and JMP Unity  
-----

2. (C) As Yemen's leading opposition, Islah dominates the JMP. Islah, in turn, remains in the shadow of Party head Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, the powerful Speaker of Parliament and Yemen's leading tribal chief. Al-Ahmar is not a reformer and does not share the views of most Islahis active in JMP politics. For JMP to run its own candidate in 2006, it must overcome not only disunity within coalition parties, but also the split in Islah between powerful al-Ahmar and more progressive elements within the party. Another mystery in this regard is the position of the Salafi tendency within Islah, led by Abdul Majid al-Zindani.

-----  
What is the JMP?  
-----

3. (U) The JMP was formed in 2002 and consists of dominant opposition party Islah, along with the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the Nasserite Unionist Popular Party, the Union of the Popular Forces (UPF), the Arab Socialist National Baath Party and the Haq party. The coalition lacks by-laws or infrastructure and functions through a central committee of one representative from each party. JMP decisions require consensus of the multipartisan committee, followed by ratification by the leadership of the individual parties.

-----  
Political Reform First  
-----

4. (C) Mohammed Qahtan, Islah party representative to the JMP central committee, said that the coalition was concentrating its efforts on releasing what will be called the "Political Reform Initiative" as the first step in developing a JMP platform for 2006. Abdul Malik al-Mutawakil of the JMP central committee from the UPF added that the JMP position is that "political reform must come first" and that nothing can be done without it. Other JMP representatives have echoed his call to other diplomats in forums throughout Sanaa.

5. (C) Although the release of the JMP reform initiative has been anticipated for some time, to date the individual party leaderships have been unable to agree on a unified position. JMP representatives are tight lipped on the document's content although YSP MP and JMP representative Aidroos Nasser noted that the themes of the initiative would entail, "an initial demand for political and economic reform, followed by a call for a correction in the balance of power and a true fight against corruption."

-----  
An Opposition Candidate Who Can Survive the Campaign  
-----

6. (C) According to Qahtan, the JMP reform agenda is to serve as a platform for a competitive opposition candidate in 2006. The JMP party representatives insisted that no one has been picked, but that they were seeking a "national, non-military figure" willing to challenge Saleh head-on. "If such a candidate can survive three months into the election without assassination," quipped Qahtan, "he would surely win." There have been rumors that Qahtan himself might be the candidate, but he denied this saying that whoever is chosen would not likely come from a political party within the coalition.

-----  
Where Will Party Loyalties Lie?  
-----

-----  
17. (C) Many in the coalition worry about the position that Islah leader al-Ahmar would take in the end. In 1999, Islah, through Ahmar, endorsed President Saleh even before Saleh's own party, the General People's Congress (GPC), did and Saleh's competition for the Presidency was a fellow GPC member. Qahtan dismissed this possibility, insisting that Islah would not nominate Saleh in 2006. "This option," said Qahtan, "would be worse for Islah than any other possible challenger to Saleh, regardless of party affiliation." Qahtan, however, is not considered an al-Ahmar insider. Post interlocutors further point out that Sheikh al-Ahmar currently denies that a JMP reform initiative even exists.

-----  
Ruling GPC Reaches out to Opposition  
-----

18. (C) In May Saleh commissioned GPC Secretary General Dr. Abdul Karim al-Iryani to renew a "National Dialogue" with the opposition parties. These meetings have largely failed. In early June, the JMP accepted Saleh's invitation with the stipulation that they would coordinate on the agenda, but failed to get agreement. Reports have surfaced that Saleh conducted one-on-one meetings with the Islahi, Nasserite and YSP leaderships, outside of the JMP context. JMP representatives insist that there are no unannounced agreements between any party and the GPC on the 2006 elections. Only as a coalition, they insisted, can the JMP really challenge the President.

19. (C) Comment: With the 2006 Presidential election approaching, JMP feels challenged to produce a detailed reform initiative. If JMP members can avoid the temptation to cut separate election deals with the ruling GPC, they might have a chance to present an alternative agenda that focuses on Yemen's festering corruption and poverty. With Islah still in the shadows of the GPC and tribal elite, however, the JMP faces a significant challenge in asserting its own identity. Given domestic politics, the fact that the JMP has lasted since 2002 is in itself something of an accomplishment. As Mutawakil expressed it, "Hopefully every party will represent itself one day, but for now we need a strong coalition if we are to play a role in shaping Yemen's future." End Comment.  
Khoury